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SUBJECT: Tough to Talk About: TIP in South China

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: Talking TIP is not a popular topic in South China. Many recent requests by the Consulate have been turned down in Guangxi and Guangdong. However, trafficking in persons, particularly of women, continues to occur from within China's inland provinces to South China, as well as from other countries, such as Vietnam. While increased economic development has lowered the number of women trafficked to be sold as wives to rural areas in Guangdong, reports of trafficking for labor or the sex trade continue to be published. According to Vietnamese diplomats in Guangzhou, TIP cooperation with local authorities has improved and Vietnam signed an MOU with China in 2006 to enhance cross-border cooperation and procedures for victim identification, assistance and re-integration. While not involved in the criminal aspects of trafficking in persons (TIP), such as prostitution, the Guangdong Women's Federation (WF) has shifted its focus from the spouse trade to public education to prevent migrant working women from falling victim to trafficking schemes. Improvements have been seen, but it is likely that the extent of the problem is underreported by authorities. Trafficking in spouses will continue to grow as the gender imbalance in China widens. End summary.

Vietnam: Cooperation with China on TIP is Improving

12. (SBU) In a January 31 meeting with the Consul General, Vietnam Consul General in Guangzhou Vo Thinh described the Vietnam-China border as long, mountainous, and difficult to control. Traffickers frequently use river and forest routes. In China, the majority of trafficked persons from Vietnam are located in South China, i.e., Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi, but have been found as far north as Chongqing. Vietnam has expended much effort in public education through media and the grassroots efforts of the Women's Union and sentenced traffickers to fines and prison. It does not penalize the victims of trafficking, although social stigma remains an issue for many victims. Increased efforts by both sides to promote economic development and trade and historically close business relationships make it harder to check goods and persons, with a potentially negative impact on trafficking enforcement. While unable to provide statistics on numbers of cases, the Consul General thought cooperation between Guangdong and Vietnam was positive. He described the Guangdong Public Security Bureau (PSB) as being much more responsive in recent years, though the PSB still did not provide that much information on the subject. He termed ministerial cooperation with China on TIP "good" but called local-level cooperation poor. Vo also said that Vietnam had discussed TIP issues with neighboring countries and at ASEAN, including at

meetings attending by China, in an effort to combat the problem.

¶3. (SBU) In May 2006, the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and China signed an MOU to increase cross-border law enforcement cooperation. The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) was tasked with implementing the "victim assistance and re-integration and raising public awareness" portfolio of the GVN's National Action Plan against TIP. It also began a series of cross-border workshops with provincial women's federation counterparts in China. These reportedly have been useful.

¶4. (SBU) Vietnam's approach to solving the issue additionally involves improving the economic climate and employment situation within Vietnam so that people are not lured by the promise of jobs outside of the country. As part of what Vo termed Vietnam's new policy on TIP, the Prime Minister's 2004 National Action Plan is designed to assist women victims, with the central government providing a global fund for use by Vietnam's embassies and consulates to help repatriate victims of trafficking. When contacted by a victim, the embassy/consulate verifies the person's identity and checks their status with the local PSB. The office provides money and sometimes clothes to the victim and issues a certificate so the person can return to Vietnam. In Guangdong and Guangxi, the Vietnam Consulate will provide a consulate vehicle to drive the victim to the Vietnam border in Guangxi at Dongxing or Pingxiang, so there is no danger of kidnapping. Vo was unaware of the establishment of a repatriation center in Dongxing, Guangxi, which was set up in 2005. Vietnam has also established victim assistance and assessment centers on its side of the border. Note: Congen Guangzhou plans to take a trip to the border area in the coming months to look into this matter further. End Note.

¶5. (SBU) Though Vo was unable to comment on prostitution

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trafficking, we would note a number of news reports in 2006 that China had cooperated with Vietnam in cracking down on an increasing number of cases of women trafficked for the sex trade, labor, and spouses into Hainan, Guangxi, Guangdong and other provinces. We have also heard reports of children being trafficked into China for sex and labor. UNICEF-Vietnam is currently working on a project to train the Vietnamese Border Command on child trafficking. In Vietnam, trafficking networks are difficult to prosecute because they often operate in chains of referrals where few know the ultimate destination. Along many parts of the Vietnam / China border, business relationships are historically close and traffickers take advantage of this. Embassy Hanoi points out that across the border in Vietnam's northeast Quang Ninh Province, the Vietnam Women's Union reported that there has been a definite increase in TIP since 2000. Before 2000, many Vietnamese women went voluntarily to China to marry Chinese men; however, since then, conditions for women in Quang Ninh have largely improved so "voluntary" cross-border marriages have decreased.

¶6. (SBU) Post asked the Guangxi PSB for a meeting and to visit the Dongxing border area to discuss TIP issues, its response was that the USG had no relation to the TIP issue with Vietnam and refused. When we requested the meeting again, the PSB said there was little to discuss since the repatriation center concept was just at the beginning stage (Note: news reports indicate that the Dongxing center was established in 2005 and a second center established in Congzuo, also on the Vietnam-Guangxi border. End note.). The Guangzhou and Guangdong PSB and Guangzhou Women's Federation also declined to discuss TIP with Post despite news reports that indicate increased enforcement actions by law enforcement and administrative agencies.

Guangdong Women's Federation: Stopping The Sale Of Wives

¶7. (SBU) The Guangdong Women's Federation was more willing to talk. Guo Suisheng, Deputy Director of Women's Rights and Interests Department, and Hu Lilng, Deputy Director of the Organization-liaison Department of Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation, told Congenoff on February 8 that the Guangdong Women Federation is the largest "NGO" in China, though all its staff are

on the payroll of the Government. Its main mission is to promote women's rights and interests, including combating trafficking in women. According to Guo, the Chinese authorities emphasize fighting against the trafficking in women. China has a law called "Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law" passed in 1993 and amended in 2005. The National Congress also issued a memorandum on severely punishing the trafficking of women and children in early 1990s. Such laws, as well as regulations and judicial interpretations issued by the Government, the Supreme Court and the Procuratorate define very clearly each official agency's role and related proceedings and remedies in combating the trafficking in women. Each layer of Governments' annual work plans also contain the element of protection women's interests and rights, which Guo said have an anti-trafficking element. According to Guo, in China's criminal code, "the trading of deceived women" and "forced prostitution" are two separate charges. The Women's Federation is essentially responsible for the prevention and rescue of the former victims, while the PSB takes care of the latter problem as a criminal issue. Inside the provincial PSB there is a special unit designated for enforcing anti-trafficking in women and children.

18. (U) In addition to implementing its legislatively-mandated enforcement efforts, Guo said the Chinese Government often launches interregional and interagency campaigns to fight against TIP problems. In 2001, Guangdong, as a major "import" market of trafficked women, cooperated with governments of the "export" areas, poorer areas to Guangdong's west and north, to launch a joint campaign to fight against trafficking in women. The National Congress also sent delegations to Guangdong to inspect the effects of such campaigns. Under the Pan Pearl River Delta cooperation (Pan-PRD) framework, Guangdong's Women Federation also has signed cooperation agreements on women rights issues, including anti-trafficking with its counterparts in the eight other provinces and two Special Administrative Regions of Macau and Hong Kong of the Pan-PRD region. Cross-border Women's Federation workshops between Vietnam and China to combat TIP have also been growing.

Past Efforts Focused on Preventing Spouse Sales

19. (SBU) Guo, who has over 20 years of working experience in

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protecting women's rights in the Federation, said that in the past there are trafficking in women problems in less developed and isolated areas, particularly in the remote mountains, in order to obtain spouses. Lufeng County and Xinyi County, which are located in eastern and western areas of Guangdong respectively, are the two most notorious areas known for this problem. Farmers in those areas are so poor that local women try to leave poverty behind by marrying outside people. At the same time, few women from outside were willing come in. A "tradition" developed for local men to buy women from outside as their wives in these counties. The victim women were usually from inland provinces, such as Hunan and Sichuan. The Federation also previously provided match making services in those traditional "women import" areas. Such service is not necessary now as the TIP problem is decreasing, according to Guo. News reports continue to indicate that trafficking in women to be spouses remains a problem in less developed rural areas in China.

110. (SBU) When the Women Federation receives a report of trafficked women or a request for its assistance, it works with local police to organize enforcement actions. In the late 1990s, the Federation helped local police crack a criminal trafficking group that had sold about 30 women. Guo participated in several rescues, usually conducted at night, to spirit the women away by surprise. Due to the isolated, mountainous locations, these operations were often difficult and time-consuming.

Shifting Focus Toward Prevention Of Labor Trafficking

111. (U) Guo said the trafficking in women for spouses has been rare in recent years because the reform and opening program has improved local people's living conditions and has given them more opportunities to be exposed to the outside. In the 1980's, the

Federation handled 30-to-40 cases of trafficking in women cases each year, while in 2006, the number was only nine. The priority of the Federation's anti-trafficking efforts has shifted to preventive measures, especially to educate migrant women workers from falling victims as traded wives and sweatshop laborers.

¶12. (U) The Federation utilizes various means to educate the public. It now tries to promote migrant women workers' awareness of their legitimate rights and how to protect themselves better. They print and distribute informational materials, sponsor a hotline which number "12338" is directly accessible in the whole province, conduct training classes in factories, produce TV programs, and hold artistic performances to teach women workers the typical tricks or deceptions of traffickers. They also demonstrate skills for seeking outside assistance, such as getting attention from the police in case they are being trafficked. The Federation works with its counterparts in the labor exporting regions of inland China to introduce reliable job opportunities to migrant women workers to reduce their risks of being deceived by traffickers.

¶13. (U) After the Chinese Spring Festival, when a lot of migrant workers come to Guangdong for jobs, the Federation works with other agencies to organize anti-trafficking promotions in local railway and bus stations. In 2006, such a promotion campaign was headed by Guangdong's Vice Governor Madame Lei Yulan and covered the major migrant labor-importing cities, including Guangzhou, Foshan, Dongguan, Shenzhen, and Huizhou. In Guangzhou's railway station, the Women's Federation used a large outdoor display screen to broadcast its anti-TIP message 6,000 times within three months.

¶14. (U) In addition to educating the potential targets of trafficking, the Federation also promotes anti-trafficking awareness among factories and spouse seekers by explaining to them the likely penalty they will face if they use trafficking to obtain women. Interlocutors said rescuing victims of trafficking from prostitution is not their responsibility as the Federation does not have enforcement authority and cannot conduct raids on its own. However, the Federation always passes the request for helping victims to the police, and provides psychological counseling and material support after they are rescued. Such services are also provided to children rescued from trafficking. In 2002, the Police cracked a child trafficking group in Lufeng County in Guangdong Province that had sold eight children to Lufeng County and Hainan Province. The Federation provided psychological and communication counseling to the affected families, and later managed to obtain Amway's sponsorship of the children's tuitions.

Comment: Not Talking About It Will Not Make The Problem Go Away

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¶15. (SBU) The Chinese Government may well have an efficient and organized way of combating trafficking in persons, but provincial and local enforcement agencies are reluctant to discuss progress in this sensitive area. As the current leadership in Beijing stresses the building of a harmonious society in which weaker social groups get more attention and public services, TIP issues will likely get more attention in prosperous Guangdong Province. The increased gender imbalance in China due to traditional preferences for boys over girls, accentuated by the one-child policy, could cause a return to the purchase of spouses down the road as millions of unmarried men seek wives from among a diminishing number of women. End comment.

¶16. (U) Embassy Hanoi contributed to this cable.

Goldberg